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# MAPPING FILM EXHIBITION IN SCOTLAND BEFORE PERMANENT CINEMAS

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A central idea in current film historiography is that "the experience of cinema does not exist outside the experience of space" (Allen "The place" 16). This is reflected in the wealth of studies about the places of exhibition which has transformed the once text-centred perspective of film studies, its sources and methodologies, by understanding cinema-going in localized terms, as part of the fabric of everyday life.

This paper is based on the first stage of my research into the development of film distribution and exhibition in Scotland. The tension between the reproducible text and the historically-situated audience is played out in the networks and practices of regional film supply in a way that is highly responsive to a geographical approach. I use the locations of exhibition as a lateral way to find out about distribution. This is necessary since specialized sources regarding distribution are scarce and, in any case, for the pre-1905 period the compartmentalized view of the film industry is unhelpful. Material from local newspapers and archives, as well as the trade press, sheds light on the local and regional contexts of early film exhibition, foregrounding the commercial networks that had sustained 19th century practices of fairground showmanship and lantern lecturing.<sup>1</sup>

These existing institutions were themselves undergoing profound change, as part of the broader historical processes associated with the second industrial revolution. Scotland around 1900 was an industrial

hub of global significance in shipbuilding, steel production, coal mining, and textile manufacture. Most of this economic activity was located within the central Lowlands, to the extent that by 1900 three-quarters of the total national population of 4.5 million lived in that area (Flinn *et al.* 306). The Highlands, on the other hand, were being depopulated; emigration was peaking, and there was much overcrowding and poverty in the booming cities. The present approach to a non-metropolitan exhibition culture aims to understand how such local contingencies shaped the emerging film trade and informed the Scottish experience of cinema.

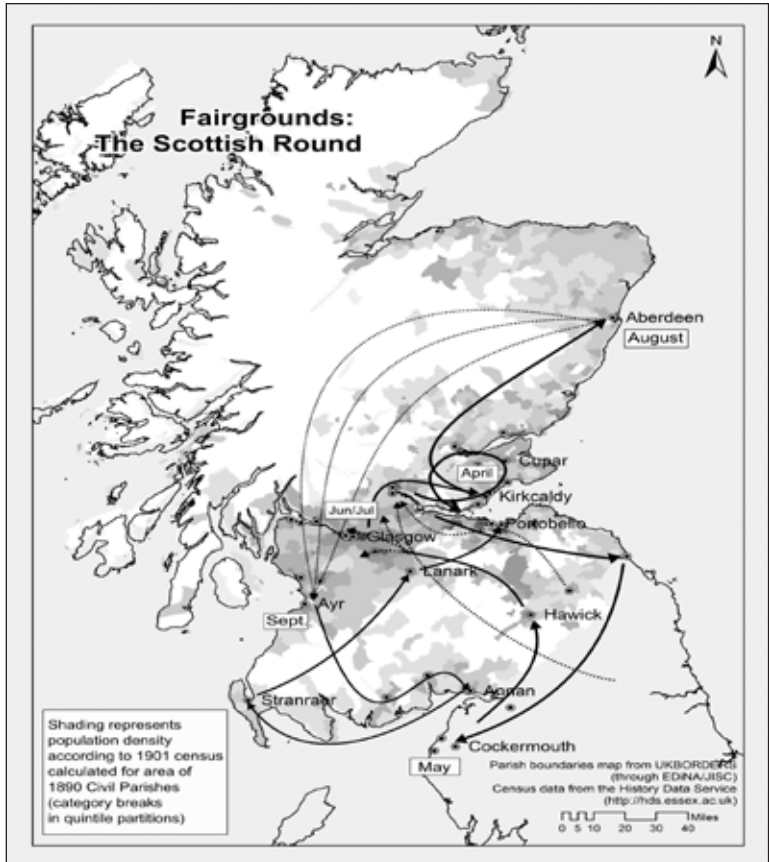
## THE SCOTTISH FAIRGROUND ROUND

Between 1897 and 1914, fairground showmen were amongst the most influential film exhibitors in the UK. Our understanding of the role of fairground showmen in popularizing moving pictures and sustaining the incipient film industry has been considerably augmented since the publication, in 1994, of a pioneering work by Vanessa Toulmin, in which she argues that "the moving picture industry was shaped in its initial years by the traveling showmen" (236). Following this hypothesis, this section will look at the pattern of fairground traveling in Scotland and the social relationships that it fostered, arguing that these forms of mobility can be understood as part of the informal

distribution channels of early film—which led in turn to more formal modes of cinema exhibition.

Scottish fairground families formed a distinct community, although they had strong links with the North of England and with Ireland, and they traveled on broadly stable but flexible routes.<sup>2</sup> The sequence of fairs that a particular family would visit each year was in part determined by tradition and contacts, in part by commercial reasons, and in part by the viability of transport, which was always a challenge. The standard set-up for film exhibition on the fairgrounds, usually called “a Bioscope show” after one of the earliest practicable projectors, consisted of a canvas tent, wooden forms for seating, the projection equipment, and a decorative front. Up to 1905, most Bioscope shows could be packed into two or three horse-drawn wagons, but as the fronts grew more ornate, and incorporated mechanical organs and electrical generators, this became more difficult. In some cases, the wagons were adapted to travel on the railways; although the rates were high, the secretary of the Showmen and Van-Dwellers’ Association reckoned in 1896 that more than four thousand vans traveled weekly on the

British railways (“Showmen and Van-Dwellers”). The turn-of-the-century boom of steam-powered rides, of which more will be said below, popularized off-rail traction engines for fairground transport; however, traction engines still traveled on roads, not railways, and were prone to accidents. There is scarcely a fairground family that does not have a story of loss of life, limb or property when these heavy, temperamental machines got out of control. The engines were not much faster than the horses, so the geographical constraints on touring did not disappear. The goal was still to find an optimal string of fairs, maximizing the potential paying audiences while minimizing the costs of transport and the off days.



**Fig. 1.** Traveling pattern of Scottish showpeople as described in *The Era* and *The Showmen's Yearbook* around 1900.<sup>4</sup>

The basic template was the “Scottish Round” of fairgrounds, which, as described to *The Era* by an anonymous showman, ran from March to December (“The Showman World” 1899; *Showmen’s Yearbook*). Starting from their winter quarters, showpeople could visit several towns before arriving at Kirkcaldy, to the North of Edinburgh across the Firth of Forth, in the second week of April. A tour of Fife followed, and then two weeks on “private business,” which meant renting ground privately for a couple of attractions, or attending events like temperance fêtes and local bazaars. Towards the end of May some shows returned to England for the Cumbrian fairs at Cockermouth, Carlisle, and Maryport, before converging at the Scottish town of Hawick, close to the border, in time for the Common Riding. July was when most of the main city holidays took place, so there were fairs at Greenock, Glasgow, Dundee, and Stirling, and then at Aberdeen and Perth in August. After about a month on private grounds, October brought several fixtures in the Lowlands and Ayrshire. The season ended with a string of dates to the west and south of Glasgow, reaching Irvine or Kilmarnock in Ayrshire on the first week of December, after which the showmen started preparing for the Christmas and New Year fairs.<sup>3</sup>

Around this template, there was ample room for an individual showperson’s judgment, balancing ease of travel with their knowledge of places and audiences, the conditions of the ground lease, and the kind of opposition they were likely to encounter. This insider’s knowledge was shared and updated within the business and family bonds of the traveling community. The Scottish Screen Archive keeps a series of manuscript letters from Peter Swallow, a small-time but enterprising roundabout (carousel) proprietor, to George Green, one of the most successful of Scottish showmen. In this hurried, pragmatic correspondence, Swallow reports on the (often parlous) state of the machines and grounds that he is apparently managing for Green. Having no capital of his own, Swallow advises Green

about investment opportunities in grounds available for lease, while also warning him to be careful when talking to other showmen who were in opposition or were not members of the Association (Swallow Letter 17 Jan 1905). These few fascinating letters give a glimpse of the mix of social contacts, personal experience, business methods, and calendar customs that made the yearly round of fairs a very flexible network rather than a strict schedule or circuit.

As the description above shows, the Scottish round in fact included several dates in the North of England. Most of the families that traveled these routes originally had their winter base in Lancashire, Sunderland or Yorkshire.<sup>5</sup> This might explain why no mention is made of the several important horse and feeing fairs that fell to the north of the central belt, such as Aikey Fair in Aberdeenshire in late July. This omission suggests that the description given in the *Showman’s Yearbook* sees the main touring routes in Scotland in the context of the Northern English fairground runs, in an area roughly stretching from Manchester to Perth. While the routes of the grandest shows overlapped with some of the Midlands circuits, which in turn might include London dates, many showpeople did not travel so far, relying mostly on local circuits not represented here. The fairground trade can then be seen as a nation-wide network at variable scales, often held together by family ties, but with internal regional dynamics. The bigger fairs, such as Nottingham Goose Fair, Ayr Races, and Kirkcaldy Links Market, were important junctions in these informal networks.

At the peak of their popularity there were nine Bioscope booths at Hull Fair in 1900 (Toulmin 2008 20). The roundabout engineers, Savage’s, showcased their new models at King’s Lynn, an important charter fair in the East of England, where the Vandwellers’ Association also held an annual meeting (“The Showman World” 1897). The Scottish showmen had a charity concert and meeting at Paisley near Glasgow during the races (“Travellers’ Meeting”).

Since the fairgrounds represented such a substantial part of the British film trade in its first ten years, manufacturers were prepared to make an extra effort to get their business. The larger fairs in England and Wales functioned as both showcases and marketplaces for equipment and films. According to A. C. Bromhead, companies like Gaumont sent "a representative with a bag full of films which the showman would be allowed to try out on the screen before his audience" (4). In some aspects, the early trade in films was very similar to that of other fairground necessities. Following Gerben Bakker, films can be understood as "intermediary products"—a good needed by showpeople to produce "spectator-hours," which were what exhibitors actually sold (320-21). The fairground business had a number of other ancillary trades, including the design and construction of steam rides and traction engines; the making of tilts and painted fronts; poster printing; and the wholesale of small prizes, gingerbread and coconuts. A look at the *Showman's Year Book* for 1902 reveals that relatively few of the advertisers were based in London. The greatest concentration of fairground-related traders was in Lancashire in the North-West of England, although this may in part reflect the fact that *The Showman* was published in the then Lancashire town of Oldham. Heavy machinery came mostly from the East of England, and coconuts could be acquired near their ports of entry, mainly London or Liverpool.

In comparison, the film trade seems highly centralized. Although there were several producers making films in the provinces, small firms tended to sell their product to London-based dealers like Philipp Wolff, Gaumont, and the Warwick Trading Company. Like the other advertisers in *The Showman*, these companies encouraged their potential clients to visit the showroom, but they were also happy to send a price list on application (see Christie 209-17). The promises of film suppliers were the same as those of other wholesalers of fairground paraphernalia: variety and novelty of their

stock, immediate availability, and prompt dispatch via railway or parcel post. But in reality sales by catalogue reflected a market where both the supply of, and demand for, films were irregular (Brown and Barry 21), and where films were seen as durable goods that showmen should stock. Thus, for instance, Williamson's advertised in January 1902:

No showman who values his reputation can afford to be without a copy of *The Attack on a China Mission Station* [aka: *Attack on a China Mission—Bluejackets to the Rescue*, Williamson 1900]. This film has been before the public over a year, and is still a Trump Card.

The same advert, however, urged showmen to send their addresses so they could be notified at once of "any new subject likely to interest you." Gaumont's monthly "Elge" list of films, a reliable system of catalogue updates that allowed showpeople to plan their purchases, probably helped make this one of the most successful firms in the trade. But even with increased regularity, catalogue sales continued to lack exclusivity: once a film was available on the catalogue, it was available for everyone. Enterprising showpeople had the option to travel to London or Continental Europe to seek out novelties before they were offered by the agents; they could also make or commission local films. The Blackburn-based film, Mitchell & Kenyon, had several clients who worked in Scotland, of whom the better studied is George Green (McBain 113-21).

In any case, it was not easy or cheap for a Scottish exhibitor to put together an attractive program. Before the adoption of film rental, exhibitors needed to buy films outright, which they could then keep, use and re-sell with no restriction. In 1897 each "view" of around 50ft (under a minute) cost between £2/10s and £4,<sup>6</sup> a substantial amount even after it was halved by the end of the Boer war in 1902 (Brown "War on" 28-36). By then, having a local film made by Mitchell and Kenyon cost 10d per foot



plus the operator's fee and expenses, which worked out at about the 1897 rates (Neal, Toulmin, and Vick 6). Second-hand films, on the contrary, could be bought cheaply in many locations. Manufacturers had no control over the circulation of their prints, and the only limit was set by the physical deterioration of the film stock. Showpeople with available capital accumulated more films than they needed; for instance, when Joseph Wingate had to sell all his equipment after a devastating fire near Stirling, he offered 60,000 feet of film (Scrivens and Smith 160-1). The December 1900 and January 1901 issues of *The Showman* contain classified ads from sellers in several provincial towns in England, while in Scotland the Border Kinetograph Company was selling used films out of their public-hall exhibition venture at Hawick. As noted before, Hawick was a crucial node in the fairground calendar, being one of the points of convergence between the Northern English and Scottish rounds. Thus, the second-hand film trade exploited potential network connections and linked fairground and public hall exhibitors. The next section will argue that the increasing regularization of the fairgrounds reduced the flexibility of the network pattern of movement and trade. The new conditions favored the growth of better-capitalized showpeople and required different forms of film supply.

### THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE FAIRGROUND

Around the turn of the 20th century, the fairground business was in the throes of a substantial transformation, both in its management practices and in its physical shape. As Vanessa Toulmin points out, "the technological changes that transformed the landscape of the Victorian fair also had consequences for the organizational aspect of the business" (Toulmin 2003 62). Traditionally, the ground where the rides and sideshows were pitched was controlled directly by local councils, who collected a levy. Showmen

scrambled to get into the grounds as soon as they were open in order to secure a good location. But in the later decades of the nineteenth century, local authorities had started transferring responsibility over the grounds to a single private lessee, who would then collect rents and determine pitches for all the attractions. Since these were assigned in advance, it became more important to have a pre-arranged plan.

The need for pre-determined spatial arrangements in the grounds also reflected a change of emphasis brought about by the development of steam-powered rides. The swings and roundabouts moved from the sidelines to the center of the fairground, and, being expensive machines, their owners could not risk getting an unsuitable location or too much opposition when they arrived at the fair (Swallow 52; Toulmin 2003 9-10). But the spatial reordering of the fairgrounds, and the proliferation of private business and holiday carnivals, also reflect a change in their social context.

Throughout the nineteenth century, as Trevor Griffiths has shown, the leisure aspect of fairs had surpassed their functional value as an opportunity for the hiring of farm hands and the trading of goods (181; see also Bakker 72-85). Leisure time and disposable income were on the increase amongst industrial populations, creating new opportunities for the so-called "amusement caterers," who were no longer obliged to adhere to the traditional calendar of fairs. The permanent or semi-permanent amusement sites that opened around the turn of the century in Glasgow's Vinegarhill and Portobello in Edinburgh were devoted exclusively to amusement.<sup>7</sup> The expansion of private grounds encouraged some showpeople to develop a more managerial side, without giving up touring. One of the most important in Scotland was John Wilmot, who was a highly respected figure in the trade and managed the indoor Christmas carnival at Edinburgh Waverley market for the music-hall magnate, H.E. Moss, as well as running a series of other fairs (Swallow 54).

Bridging the gap between theatrical seasons, the semi-permanent carnivals re-

sponded to a steadier demand for entertainment, and thus required different business practices. The emerging film rental sector eventually supplanted the distribution function of the fairground routes, creating the chain of supply that sustained permanent cinemas. Since many fairground Bioscope owners became cinema proprietors and even film renters, some of their personal connections and touring arrangements must have been imported into the new trade. However, the delivery of films to fixed locations was a fundamentally different operation. More regularized methods of film supply constituted adaptations to more regularized leisure practices. As Griffiths argues, new forms of production and employment emphasized clock-driven regularity at work, but were also connected to “a deliberate project of cultural and political reform,” which sought to transform the use of time outside working hours too (171). Central to this project was the notion of “rational” entertainment and the rise of the temperance movement. Both issues informed the history of the other main strand of early exhibition which I will consider, namely public hall shows.

## PUBLIC HALL SHOWS

When I travelled with Mr William Walker’s Company, the country towns did not have the convenient and commodious halls they boast now-a-days, and many a time and oft we had to fit up a tent (begged, borrowed, or stolen!) or commandeer a barn in which to give our “show”. Even on occasions we improvised a stage in a fish shed, in which the fishermen and women would stand for two hours and more without a murmur (Skinner 53).

As the celebrated fiddle player James Scott Skinner recalled, writing about the late nineteenth century before moving pictures, there was a history of winter entertainments taking place in any enclosed space of sufficient capacity. During the second half of that century many Scottish towns built new

halls to avoid the need for patrons to stand around in freezing sheds. The projects were often started with money collected by a temperance or friendly society such as the Good Templars, and completed with donations from wealthy local individuals and community fundraising. In rural areas, the halls were governed by committee instead of being managed by a single entrepreneur or lessee, which distances them from music halls and American opera houses (Waller 223-34). The minutes books and plans of many of these halls are kept in local and regional archives all over Scotland. One example will serve to illustrate the context in which the first traveling cinema shows were received in smaller towns.

The accounts of the Uphall Public Hall are kept at the West Lothian Archives, on the outskirts of Livingston, halfway between Glasgow and Edinburgh. The village of Uphall was not very far from this location, and it was at the heart of the shale mining district which supplied the paraffin oil industry. Following the establishment of Young’s Paraffin Works, the population tripled in the twenty years to 1891, reaching 922 (Groome). This industrial workforce was, as so often, the target for a series of organizations, most of them aligned with a self-improving ethos (although there was also a soccer club!). The hall, a stone building dating from 1875, had been built primarily to house the Sunday school, but it was used for all other social functions, from weddings to political meetings. In 1902, the Workmen’s Union had monthly meetings; the Rechabites and the Shepherds had temperance concerts; there were bazaars, flower shows, and weekly dances during the summer.

This diversity of uses, together with the governance by committee, helped to protect public halls from moral suspicion, and hence created a reception context for cinema that was arguably far removed from metropolitan concerns over the immorality of popular entertainment. The constitution of the Dunrossness Temperance Hall in Shetland, for instance, stipulated that “in no case shall the Hall be available for purposes of a disrepu-

table nature, nor shall the Hall be available for propagating sectarianism;" this gave grounds for their rejection of a Salvation Army meeting in 1908 (*Story of the Dunrossness Central Public Hall* 14/19). For a showman, falling out of favor with the hall committees could mean being shut out of the public hall circuit altogether, as well as losing private contracts. Although the character of the programs varied greatly, and objections were sometimes raised, in general the prudence exercised by Scottish exhibitors in their choice of subject allowed their cinematograph shows to reach conservative rural areas without the controversy that surrounded cinema in some urban contexts. By staking so much on their reputations, exhibitors in this guise served as mediators, assuaging potential anxieties about the new medium, as Joe Kember has argued (44-83). The spaces where their shows took place played an important part in legitimizing moving picture entertainment.

Paul Maloney has argued that the popular concerts organized by religious, improving, and municipal societies in Glasgow's halls broadened the audience for variety entertainment in the city by setting it in "a secure, publicly regulated environment" with "the unmistakable imprimatur of respectability" (Maloney 7, 192). This contrasted with the more disreputable associations evoked by music halls. The village hall was an inclusive space, at least symbolically, since tickets were not cheap (usually starting from 6d—around half a day's wages for a rural laborer). The permanence of these stark stone buildings contributed to the sense of seamless continuity from legitimized pre-cinematic practices, through traveling film shows, to the transformation of the hall into a picture palace.

In contrast to the decentralized interactions made possible by the fairground network, Scottish public hall showmen worked out of regional centers, and they seem to have had relatively little contact with each other. The impermanent film shows that occupied public halls in Scotland worked within three patterns of traveling with corresponding business models, which could however be implemented at different times by the same

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Fig. 2. *Aberdeen Journal* Sept 24, 1897.

company. These were:

- a. *The lantern lecturer model.* Single engagements—either at showman's financial risk or for a set fee. Operator, machines and films went back to company headquarters immediately. The show could be a complete program including musical acts, a stand-alone film program, or an addition to a bill outside the showman's control.
- b. *The concert party model.* A company was assembled temporarily to tour in a region for a few months, with live performers and films. The owner of the cinema equipment could be the manager of the company, or the cinematograph could have been hired as a variety turn.
- c. *Longer runs in large urban halls* hired by the exhibitor.

The following section will focus on the case of Aberdeen bookseller-turned-lanternist, William Walker, who was involved with the three types of non-permanent show. Perhaps the most celebrated of early Scottish exhibi-



### Walker & Co. in Aberdeenshire and the North-East

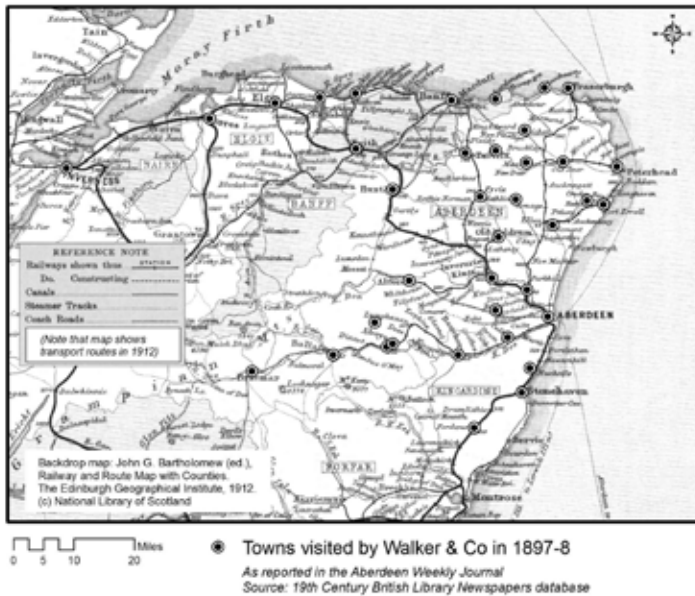


Fig. 3. Walker & Co. in North-East Scotland.

tors, Walker claimed to have ten thousand lantern slides by the time he acquired a Wrench cinematograph projector in September 1896. He hired the slides out to professionals and amateurs at 6d per dozen per night. He also had several skilled lanternists who could provide a complete show on request, for private parties, parish concerts, and school events (Thomson 7). To this line of work he added film shows under the same on-demand model. Walker represented the higher end of the public hall spectrum, listing appearances at the royal residence in Balmoral as well as Christmas shows in Highland estates. Keeping a clean reputation was therefore paramount.

Besides, Walker was involved in another form of trade, namely bookselling, both wholesale and retail. In fact, selling books and giving lantern entertainments were economic activities that could feed into each other: libraries were being built with the donations from Andrew Carnegie—the Scots-born millionaire founder of the Carnegie Steel Company in Pittsburgh, PA—but he did not provide money for books. Carnegie insisted that his libraries should be places for im-

provement, not entertainment; in places like Dunrossness, the implicit tension between the two models led to protracted discussions over the distribution and partitioning of the floor area (*Story of Dunrossness Central Public Hall*; see also Nobbs). Its educational overtones meant that library committees might look to “Walker & Company’s Unique Cinematograph Exhibition” as an appropriate means to raise funds, which could then be invested in books—bought from Walker!

In this kind of low-risk arrangement, the exhibitor did not need to arrange hall bookings or bill-posting, and would not sustain any losses if the event turned out to be a failure; however, he was not paid more than the flat rate either if it was successful. Walker & Co. combined these on-request appearances with their own shows, for which they engaged musicians and elocutionists. These shows were run as single engagements in small towns, but increasingly as longer stays in Aberdeen, Dundee and other larger settlements. The relatively low rents charged by provincial public halls, and the network of contacts established within previous trades such as Walker’s book business, allowed the

cinematograph to reach even surprisingly small villages and remote locations.

### CONCERT PARTIES

Concert parties had long been an important part in the life of Scottish rural communities; around 1900, there were plenty of companies touring the length and breadth of the country. Walker's main competitor in Aberdeen, Robert Calder, had a tour that included moving pictures and went to Kirkwall, Lerwick, Scalloway and Stromness in the Northern Isles (Skinner 58). A typical touring show included vocal and instrumental music, artistic dancing, declamation, humorists, and sometimes a phonograph demonstration. In addition, lantern slides were used at the start of the show, so moving pictures were easily added to the concert format when Walker and Calder became owners of cinematograph equipment (Skinner 52-53). Indeed, lantern slides of floral arrangements, shown between films, continued to be one of the most celebrated features of Walker's shows. Such refinements were usually beyond the reach of those managers of concert parties who were not film exhibitors themselves; as a result they resorted to hiring a machine and operator at a flat rate through variety agents or classified ads.

The National Archives of Scotland hold the records of an illustrative court case. In 1903, one Alexander Mathieson organized a three-week concert tour of mining villages in Linlithgowshire, the heart of the industrial central belt.<sup>8</sup> He contacted a few well-known highland dancers, singers and comedians, but the centerpiece was to be Georges Méliès' fantasy epic *A Trip to the Moon* (*Le Voyage dans la Lune* 1902). For the cinematograph part of the program, Mathieson hired an outfit and operator from J. F. Calverto, a music-hall performer who ran a variety agency in Glasgow. All the members of the company arrived at Broxburn (near Uphall) in the afternoon before the opening night and the performance started with music and dancing, but when the cinematograph part was to begin, the operator was not able to make

the machine work. This was unfortunate for Mathieson, who had to cancel the whole tour after having paid deposits on all the halls, so he took Calverto to court and won damages and expenses. The correspondence submitted for the legal process is very useful historical evidence, as it shows how Mathieson communicated with hall-keepers, bill-posters and owners of pianos in each town. It confirms that managing a touring concert party was not at all easy. However, the capital needed was modest when compared to other modes of exhibition, and so it could be the starting point for more ambitious ventures.

Touring allowed exhibitors to make a profit with a small stock of films, thus enabling them steadily to build up that stock through catalogue sales, second-hand dealers or local production. This pattern of gradual re-investment is evident in the published reviews of Walker's shows, which show little change during each season, but a substantial recasting twice a year, around local films made by Walker and his cameraman, Paul Robello. Their 1898 autumn tour was entirely centered on Walker's films of the Highlands ("A Season's Cinematographing"), which they exhibited extensively but also distributed through the catalogue of the English film pioneer, Robert W. Paul.

Although this suggests a connection to London dealers similar to that of the Welsh showman and filmmaker, William Haggart, Walker & Co. used the production of local films mostly in the service of its regional exhibition practices, not as a fully-fledged branch of their business. Having a fixed base in Aberdeen and an ongoing bookselling/lantern business gave Walker access to capital and credit, while touring allowed him to maximize returns on the films bought or made. On a regional scale, this case supports Joe Kember's claim that the cinematograph "seemed to favour large and centralized institutions of production and exhibition" (72). Walker's temporary success allowed the company to keep adding to its stock, which in turn made it possible to run shows in urban halls for increasingly long periods of time.

## STAND-ALONE EXHIBITION IN URBAN HALLS

As Richard Brown points out, "stand-alone public hall film shows, complete with live acts, singers, orchestra, sound effects, a 'lecturer' and specially taken 'local' films," lasting up to two hours, made frequent appearances in the North of England around 1900 (Brown "New Century" 69).<sup>9</sup> This description corresponds to several Scottish examples, such as Walker's shows at the Aberdeen Music Hall, Peter Feathers at the People's Palace in Dundee, and TJ West's Modern Marvel Company at the Queen's Rooms in Edinburgh, plus frequent visits by English companies such as Sydney Carter's New Century Animated Pictures and Ralph Pringle's North American Animated Picture Company. While these shows were still non-permanent, their longer seasons and urban locations meant that they faced competition and needed to change their programs frequently, or at least to give the impression that they did.

Factual films constituted the bulk of the program for Walker's 1904 Holiday Carnival, held at the Music Hall in Aberdeen, according to a printed brochure kept at the Scottish Screen Archive. Listing more than twenty subjects, some of which were series of several films, the program indicates that a selection of these will be shown during each performance. Films by Gaumont, Warwick, Paul, and Méliès are included, as well as Walker's own productions of royal and military events. Most of the titles were relatively recent, and the brochure also promises that "any new pictures of interest which may be published during the Carnival" would be added. This suggests a ready availability of films, but still without a regular release schedule.

Since programs were a mix of tried-and-tested old films with a few attractive new ones, the longer an exhibitor had been in business, the easier it became to assemble a good show using existing stock. The advantage rested with those showmen who controlled several outfits appearing simultaneously in different places, as they could move the films between them and obtain bulk

and trade discounts from the agents (Brown "New Century" 76). Scottish exhibitors rarely had more than one show going at any one time, but they compensated by appearing in different guises. Modern Marvel's TJ West, who ran town-hall seasons, also advertised on the newspapers as a separate variety act. Edinburgh-based cinematograph operators Fraser and Elrick, and the Dundonian Peter Feathers, also alternated between private engagements, and both urban and rural halls. These multiple identities were again highly dependent on local and regional reputation.

Hence, the touring practices of public hall exhibitors inherited some of the patterns and ethos characteristic of magic lantern shows, and just as a large slide collection allowed them to provide tailored entertainments, a growing stock of films was required to provide variety in longer engagements. Having a regional base of operations made this accumulation possible, and being based in an urban centre gave access to communications and banking facilities essential for trading with London agents. Short-term touring patterns allowed these shows to combine different modes of exhibition, from flat-rate private hire to longer seasons in large urban halls, thus making the most of their investment in films and equipment.

## CONCLUSIONS: THE SPATIAL PATTERNS OF TRAVELING EXHIBITION

Moving pictures came along at a moment of great transformation in Scotland, as elsewhere. The first restless years of the history of cinema are bound up with the peak of industrialization and its attendant social changes. Momentous as these changes were, an attention to geographical patterns provides insights into the continuities from previous eras, showing gradual and piecemeal adaptations rather than abrupt shifts. The above investigation of early exhibition practices in Scotland suggests that the circuits and networks of film distribution be-

fore the establishment of fixed-site cinemas re-purposed existing structures, utilizing informal links and a great number of accumulated personal skills to adapt to economic and technological innovation.

The direct sale of films to exhibitors enabled the new medium to be integrated into diverse showmanship practices, and thus to be circulated in different ways. Since some of the functions of distribution, including transport and programming, were assumed by the exhibitor rather than the manufacturer or a middleman, the distribution patterns cannot be separated from the movement of the traveling exhibitors, which is in turn closely related to earlier models of entertainment. In the case of fairground travelers, strong connections with the North of England were maintained, constituting the basis for the reciprocal relationships between film rental agencies that were established in the years before World War I. Public hall exhibitors were able to use their reputable tradition to legitimize cinema and expand its market. However, their own success in adapting to steadier patterns of leisure facilitated the emergence of permanent cinemas and dedicated film renters. The higher levels of capital required, and the greater control exerted by producers over the exploitation of films, contributed to the decline of independent showmen-exhibitors.

Scotland's enthusiastic embrace of the cinema is a testimony to the work of many highly-skilled showpeople from a variety of backgrounds and presentational styles. Their knowledge of local conditions and audiences was crucial for the expansion of the new medium. In time, however, their work was industrialized away too, and their role became increasingly managerial, staying put while the train delivered self-contained film shows twice a week. To look at itinerant exhibition in the periphery is, then, to explore a particular form of interaction between the history of the film trade, and the micro-histories of squabbles over movable partitions in public halls, in that brief moment when the future of cinema was still wide open.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This essay will not deal with music hall showmen, partly because their influence was restricted to the main urban areas, and partly because the complexity of music hall practices needs to be studied in its own terms (see Scullion 82; Bakker 14; Allen 1980; Rossell).

<sup>2</sup>For an insider's introduction to the complex social world of Scottish traveling showpeople as it is today, the best sources are Mitch Miller's "dialectograms" of a yard in the East of Glasgow, and his mapping of kinship ties between showground families.

<sup>3</sup>The Christmas carnival at Edinburgh Waverley Market, controlled by E. H. Moss, had been organised since around 1878. By 1902, the *Showman's Year Book* listed Christmas carnivals at Aberdeen, Dunfermline, Dundee, Edinburgh, Forfar, Frazerburgh, Galashiels, Glasgow, Govan, Greenock, Kello, Kilmarnock, Kirkcaldy, Leith, Motherwell, Paisley, Renfrew, and Stirling.

<sup>4</sup>Owing to boundary changes around 1895, demographic information contained in this figure is for illustrative purposes only.

<sup>5</sup>This was the case of George Green, from Preston; George "President" Kemp, from Leicester; and the Biddalls, who wintered at Gateshead. See Brown, Richard ("New Century" 86).

<sup>6</sup>Observing the British pre-decimal monetary system in which 12d (pennies) = 1 shilling, and 20 shillings = £1.

<sup>7</sup>George Green's Carnival occupied the Vinegarhill Fields, where Glasgow Fair had been held since 1870, following a move from a more central location. During the summer of 1897, one old penny (1d) would grant



admission to the grounds, including an outdoor circus, several bands, and variety entertainment on the main stage, besides rides and sideshows owned by other showmen who leased their space from Green at so much per square foot (*The Glasgow Weekly Programme*).

<sup>8</sup>This case has been discussed before by Paul Maloney (107-8).

<sup>9</sup>Brown argues that these types of shows were "an advanced form of early cinema which was incapable of further development" (Brown, Richard "New Century" 69). The fact that several village halls were converted into cinemas can be misleading; the business models were significantly different, especially due to the expansion of film rental.

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